



EVERY DAY IN EVERY WAY

## USDA's Cultural Transformation Action Items

- LEADERSHIP
- RECRUITMENT & RETENTION
- TALENT MANAGEMENT
- EMPLOYEE DEVELOPMENT
- CUSTOMER FOCUS & COMMUNITY OUTREACH

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# MyUSDA

## A Progress Report for Employees on USDA's Cultural Transformation

Volume 2, Issue 2

November-December 2011

### A Message from Secretary Tom Vilsack

I hope you enjoyed the recent Thanksgiving holiday with your family and friends, and I wish you a safe and peaceful holiday season as we approach a new calendar year.

I want to take this opportunity to remind you that the work you do as a USDA employee is making a happier and more fulfilling holiday possible for millions of Americans. Together, we support the farmers and ranchers who put the food on our tables, and we administer programs that benefit every American, including infants and children, who would otherwise go hungry. We make a difference all year round, but our efforts are especially important during this time of the year.

As we continue to provide excellent customer service to the American public, we also strive to improve our internal business processes and procedures. We must use resources as effectively as possible and build a more modern Department that delivers the best possible results for Americans. Those are the goals of the Strengthening Service initiative, and particularly of the Administrative Solutions component of that initiative, which Chris Nelson de-

scribes in more detail on page two of this newsletter. I encourage you to read what Chris has to say and to visit the USDA Connections website, where more resources are available.

Providing the most effective customer service also depends on our understanding and embracing the Cultural Transformation initiative. We know that an inclusive, diverse workforce results in an improved work environment and increased work performance.

As I've told you in recent emails, we are celebrating USDA's sesquicentennial all next year. It has been 150 years since President Abraham Lincoln created what he called the "People's Department." Today we are fulfilling his vision of touching the lives of every American, every day, by working to fight hunger, encouraging small businesses to create jobs, and helping farmers and ranchers increase productivity while conserving natural resources.

I hope you are looking forward to this historic year for the Department. In February, we will for-



mally launch USDA's 150th anniversary commemoration at the annual Agricultural Outlook Forum. Additional observances and commemorations will be scheduled throughout the year, and I welcome these opportunities to remind the American people about the outstanding service you provide on their behalf.

May you and your family have a blessed holiday season and thrive in your work at USDA throughout the coming new year.

You can contact the staff of My USDA via email at [MyUSDA@dm.usda.gov](mailto:MyUSDA@dm.usda.gov), and be sure to visit the [USDA Cultural Transformation Website](http://www.usda.gov/culturaltransformation).

Thomas J. Vilsack

### Secretary Named 2011 Out and Equal Champion Award Finalist



Secretary Tom Vilsack was recognized in October at the 2011 Out and Equal Workplace Summit in Dallas for his work to improve worklife for USDA's Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender (LGBT) employees. The Secretary was one of five finalists for the Out and Equal Champion Award, and he was the only finalist who does not lead a Fortune 500 company. The Champion Award recognizes the leadership demonstrated by a non-LGBT individual on behalf of LGBT equality in the workplace. The Secretary was noted for his establishment of the LGBT Special Emphasis Program and his inclusion in June 2011 of gender identity and gender expression into USDA's Civil Rights Statement. The other finalists were the Chief Executive Officers of Boeing, Kimberly Clark, Chevron, and Xerox. Dr. Sophie Vandebroek of Xerox was named the winner.

## Administrative Solutions Project/ Employee Communications Update



As we approach [USDA's 150th Anniversary](#), we have an opportunity to not only commemorate the Department's accomplishments, but also to look forward and shape and strengthen USDA for the future. Although the Department will be facing unprecedented budget challenges in the next few years, Secretary Vilsack believes that we must come together and tackle these challenges head-on rather than ignore the inevitability of change. That is why Secretary Vilsack has asked USDA Leadership to undertake a review of our administrative operations to identify improvements and innovative ideas to manage this coming change.

Through this review, the Department has engaged in a thoughtful and deliberate

evaluation of its administrative activities related to Civil Rights, Information Technology, Finance and Budget, Human Resources, Homeland Security, and Procurement and Property Management. Many USDA employees have been investing significant time and effort into USDA's future through this evaluation and that does not go unrecognized.

USDA leadership has also been working together, focusing on strategies to partner in response to these challenges and take advantage of our existing resources across the 29 agencies and offices within USDA. As a result of these on-going efforts, the Department is beginning to recognize opportunities that will allow USDA and its employees to better manage change, while strengthening

the Department for future generations.

USDA is committed to ensuring employees are kept aware of the very real challenges the Department is facing and the actions being planned or taken to help address these challenges. We recognize many of you have questions and concerns about the Administrative Solutions component of USDA's Strengthening Service initiative. Some have raised concerns about how it may affect their jobs or the administrative support received as USDA employees. In addition to these questions and concerns, we are eager to engage USDA employees in these early stages of determining the scope of the Administrative Solutions initiative.

Our Communications Committee has established a [USDA Connect](#) site for all employees to engage in the Administrative Solutions initiative and provide feedback to help shape the process. USDA Connect is the place for up-to-date information on USDA's Strengthening Service through Administrative Solutions initiative. Specifically, two documents will be uploaded to USDA Connect:

- 1) Strengthening Service – Talking Points for Management/Labor Forums
- 2) Frequently Asked Questions

We will be exploring all avenues of communication throughout this process, such as listening sessions, developing partnerships with Agency Cultural Transformation Coordinators and inviting employees to provide feedback within [MY USDA](#) to truly engage every USDA employee in strengthening service across USDA.

Finally, I encourage all of you to engage in this process, recommend others to participate, and follow updates on [USDA Connect](#). If you have any questions or ideas, please feel free to share them at [administrativesolutions@usda.gov](mailto:administrativesolutions@usda.gov). As USDA employees, we engage in truly meaningful work every day, and I am proud to be serving that mission with all of you.

Chris Nelson, Administrative Solutions Project Lead



## Native American Tribes Honored at FNS in Denver

The Mountain Plains Regional Office (MPRO) of USDA's Food and Nutrition Service celebrated National American Indian/Alaskan Native Heritage Month, which is observed in November, by unveiling an exhibit at its Denver, Colorado office in which the flags of 30 different Native American Tribes are proudly displayed. This endeavor supports Cultural Transformation's goals of embracing inclusion and better understanding the people that FNS serves.

The Tribes, all of which call MPRO home, reacted very

positively when Administrator Darlene Barnes approached them about this project. Tribal leaders subsequently presented their flags during a special ceremony organized by employees. Now, when tribal leaders visit MPRO, their flag is removed from the case and put on a flag pole in the lobby for the duration of their stay.

Charles "Red" Gates, Program Director of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe's Food Distribution Program since 1982 was especially moved by the display.

"During the past 29 years, I have been fortunate enough to

be a part of many memorable events. I believe that the presentation of Tribal Flags at the 2011 Mountain Plains Regional Conference was at the top of my memory list – It was truly a proud and emotional event for me!" said Mr. Gates, adding, "I believe the idea of the flag display by Ms. Barnes and the involvement by all Tribes was a gesture of a trust that will exist for years to come."



A display featuring flags and information from numerous Native American Tribes adorns the Mountain Plains Regional Office of USDA's Food and Nutrition Service in Denver.



## HRM Green Team Initiative: Making a Difference Through Recycling

By Nicole Ebberhart

HRM Green Team Members Visit Road Runner Food Bank Recycling Facility. The members from left are: Javier Delgado (USDA- FS HRM); Lupe Rodrigues (USDA- FS HRM Green Team Chair); Adam Livermore (USDA- FS HRM Green Team); Teresa Johansen (Roadrunner Food Bank, Purchasing & Procurement Manager); and Norm Ullemeyer (Asset Management).

In alliance with Secretary Tom Vilsack's priority on Nutrition and Hunger, the Forest Service Albuquerque Service Center - Human Resources Management (ASC-HRM) **Green Team** is paving new roads to providing community support and decreasing our impact on the environment by partnering with a local food bank in Albuquerque, NM to handle recycling. Every time an employee recycles, we are making a difference.

The collaborative effort between the ASC-HRM Green Team, Asset Management, and the Roadrunner Food Bank put this idea into action. On August 1, 2011, Roadrunner Food Bank made their first pick-up from ASC-HRM. The food bank in

turn, packages and sells this material to a local recycling center and is able to generate funds for their State-wide program.

All proceeds from our recycling efforts go directly to the Roadrunner Food Bank, which provides services to more than 40,000 residents across the State. Based on projected figures from the Roadrunner Food Bank, ASC-HRM's recyclable contributions will bring in approximately \$45,000 in 2011, and is expected to increase substantially in coming years. Each dollar the food bank receives from our recycled items equates to \$9.00 of food.

Another great benefit for the Forest Service is that this new effort incurs no cost to the Agency.

The Forest Service ASC-HRM is the first organization to join efforts with the Roadrunner Food Bank in this capacity. This joint effort has proven to be a benefit to New Mexico's hungry, our environment, and is a cost savings as well. In fact, the Social Security Administration and other local businesses have joined this practice based on our initiative. The HRM Green Team is optimistic that this idea will continue to spread across the nation and across government agencies.



## Continuous Process Improvement (CPI): Transforming USDA Into a Model Agency

### CPI Training and Projects

Secretary Vilsack continues to promote the transformation of USDA into a model Agency and has established a USDA-wide process improvement initiative. Under this initiative, USDA has provided executive Continuous Process Improvement (CPI) education and incorporated CPI into leadership performance objectives. To facilitate a CPI presence across the organization, the USDA CPI Executive Sponsor, Kevin Concannon, and CPI Team Leader, Robin Heard, enlisted and trained CPI Champions in each Agency to define the USDA's CPI program and adapt and drive CPI within their respective Agencies. These Champions have trained project leaders, made CPI accessible to their organizations and initiated process improvement projects throughout USDA. Over the past year, USDA has trained over 200 USDA executives, CPI Champions, project leaders and sponsors who are now involved in over 60 active CPI projects.

### APHIS CPI

As part of the USDA Cultural Transformation efforts, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) reviewed certain programmatic processes and procedures to expedite and improve the delivery of products and services it provides to its customers. Specifically, APHIS used a variety of formal models, especially Lean Six Sigma (LSS), to analyze and document current processes, determine where improvements could be made, and develop streamlined solutions consistent with required quality. The table to the right illustrates recent process improvement projects initiated by APHIS and the anticipated savings (in percentage of process time reduced) as a result of these efforts.

APHIS FY 2011 Process Improvement Summary	
Process	%Time Reduced
Veterinary Biologics Licensing	20%
Deregulating GEOs	57%
Enforcement Actions	40%
Import Animal Product Risk Assessment	24%
Import Plant Product Risk Assessment	76%
Animal and Plant Import Rulemaking	40%
Employee Relations (ER) Cases	26%
Employee Misconduct Investigations	49%
ER Cases with Misconduct Investigations	38%
Program Investigations	37%

### NRCS Improves Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) Process

We value innovations at National Resource Conservation Service (NRCS). All conservation practices began as innovations. Innovative technologies and approaches enable landowners to address existing and emerging resource challenges. The Conservation Innovation and Grants (CIG) process enables NRCS to accelerate the delivery of innovative technologies and approaches for adoption by our customers.

NRCS offers CIG, authorized under the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) in the 2002 Farm Bill. CIG is a voluntary program intended to stimulate development and adoption of innovative conservation approaches and technologies for agricultural production, while leveraging Federal investment in environmental enhance-



CIG Process efficiencies ensure that funded projects such as the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's "Using excess manure to generate farm income in the Chesapeake's phosphorous hot spot," have an opportunity to be successfully integrated into the private sector.

ment and protection. CIG enables NRCS to work with public and private entities to accelerate technology transfer and adoption of promising technologies and approaches to address some of the nation's most pressing natural resource concerns. Last winter, Chief

Dave White, Deputy Chief Dr. Wayne Honeycutt, and Team Lead Lillian Woods began improving the CIG process to ensure that solicitation, ranking, monitoring, evaluation, and technology transfer processes used in CIG projects are meeting the purposes and intents of legislation and providing sound return on investment for the Agency.

A cross-functional team undertook a holistic evaluation of the CIG program and its ancillary processes (i.e. Funding, Announcement, and Technology Transfer). Throughout the project life cycle there were multiple discovery opportunities as the team gained insight, documented the "as-is" process, identified disconnects in

key critical actions and redefined the Technology Transfer process. The team made a number of recommendations to enhance the CIG process, including recommending a guidebook and developing standards for the Grants Review Board (GRB) and Technical Contacts, thus eliminating approximately \$77,000 in waiting time, and improving process efficiency by 30%. By



enhancing the CIG administration and technology transfer processes, the team's goal is to increase "the number of innovations on the ground," ultimately impacting the development of innovative technology and the approaches to adopt within the agency or transfer into the private sector.

## Upcoming Changes for the USDA Disability Employment Program

USDA's high engagement in Cultural Transformation is impacting the Disability Employment Program. We're working to increase new hires of individuals with disabilities and toward ensuring that our work environment is inclusive and accessible to all applicants and employees.

Now is the time to revitalize and strengthen the Disability Employment Program. During the coming months, we will be incorporating the goals of the Strengthening Service initiative, by developing and aligning our USDA Plan to Increase Employment of Individuals with Disabilities to eliminate redundancy, improve efficiency, and make better use of shared mission area resources. This process will yield greater opportunities to improve the numbers of new USDA employment of individuals with disabilities while ensuring that the

needs of our current workforce are also fulfilled.

Change also brings opportunities to learn more about our sister agency missions, and build stronger partnerships on how others do business. When we open the communication channels across agencies, we allow for shared best practices and reduce re-inventing the wheel. During 2012, we'll be establishing ways to work collaboratively, rather than individually.

USDA is already receiving recognition for moving the Disability Employment Program in a positive direction. The Secretary's efforts to track and monitor hiring goals of student and permanent employment of individuals with disabilities within the Cultural Transformation monthly reports have

caught the attention of the Office of Personnel Management. In collaboration with the Chief Human Capital Officer Council, the Office of Personnel Management Director, John Berry, has asked USDA to develop the Federal-wide plan for meeting Executive Order 13548 toward increasing employment of individuals with disabilities. This initiative will require input and support from employees located in all of parts of the country and at all levels of Federal service.

Watch this column for more information requests and reports through this column. If you have any questions or have best practices to share, please contact Alison Levy, USDA Disability Employment Program Manager: [Alison.Levy@dm.usda.gov](mailto:Alison.Levy@dm.usda.gov). We look forward to hearing from you soon!



**By Alison Levy  
USDA Disability  
Employment  
Program Manager  
and  
Montez Ashley  
Contributing Author**

## USDA Best Practice in the Forest Service

The USDA Forest Service, Eastern Region has established a best practice toward hiring individuals with disabilities in signing a Memorandum of Understanding with the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation, National Employment Team (CSAVR-NET) by Regional Forester Chuck Myers and CSAVR-NET, CEO Stephen Wooderson.

The partnership links a National network of vocational rehabilitation agencies that support and train people with disabilities to an important Federal Agency that is working to reflect the American citizens it serves. State vocational rehabilitation agencies are Federal/State programs designed to obtain, maintain, and improve employment opportunities for people with disabilities by working with vocational rehabilitation consumers, employers, and other partners. "This agreement is especially

significant for the U.S. Forest Service, since it is the first formal partnership our agency has made with a national network that represents the interests of people with disabilities," said Chuck Myers, Regional Forester of the Forest Service's Eastern Region. "The agreement will improve recruitment, hiring, and retention of people with disabilities in our workforce."

A great partnership fell into place around vision, common understanding, purpose, and communication when USDA Forest Service, Eastern Region's Equal Employment Specialist, Montez Ashley and the Council of State Administrators for Vocational Rehabilitation, National Employment Team's (CSAVR-NET), Director of Business Relations Kathy West-Evans, initiated a historic partnership last fall.

"We are pleased to be part of this partnership," said Charlene

Dwyer, DVR Administrator. "The State vocational rehabilitation agencies represented at this signing have a common goal: obtaining, maintaining and improving employment opportunities for employees with disabilities. This collaboration is particularly exciting because it involves federal jobs."

It all started when the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) Area Directors Patricia Johnson and Lea Collins-Worachek served as the keynote speaker for Eastern Region employees during the Disability Employment Awareness Month. It progressed further when Forest Service Equal Employment Opportunity Specialist, Montez Ashley and Job Corps Liaison, Clara Johnson worked with Patricia Johnson to place a Job Corps student in the Forest Service using the Federal Schedule A hiring authority. This worked so well that Ms. Johnson (DVR) and Ms. Ashley pursued providing

**A cornerstone  
of our USDA  
Cultural  
Transformation  
effort is to  
increase  
employment of  
individuals with  
disabilities.**

**This column  
includes  
information,  
resources, and  
success stories  
from throughout  
USDA that  
are being  
shared to  
support this  
initiative.**

similar opportunities throughout the Eastern Region by connecting with Ms. West-Evans.

# TELEWORK AT USDA

By Mika J. Cross, USDA Work/Life and Wellness Program Manager



## Happy Anniversary to the Telework Enhancement Act!

**“Presentism – the practice of sitting at one’s desk without really working can be just as problematic as absenteeism, and I’m an adamant supporter of telework because workers in an effective telework program can only be judged by their results.”**

**—OPM Director John Berry**

It’s been nearly a year since President Barack Obama, on December 9, 2010, signed into law the Telework Enhancement Act of 2010. The enactment greatly expanded previously existing laws governing telework in the executive branch and mandated that all Federal Agencies maximize the use of telework.

Over the past year, the USDA Telework Program has made enormous strides, thanks in large part to its alignment with the Secretary’s Cultural Transformation Initiatives as an integral component to establish USDA as a model employer of choice.

USDA’s Telework Program enhances the recruitment of top talent, the retention of current employees, and raises the level of employee job satisfaction and worker productivity. These findings were confirmed recently in the Merit Systems Protection Board’s business strategy report on Telework.

MSPB’s Telework Report found that **59-percent of Government supervisors view telework as a means to recruit high-quality employees and 62-percent of supervisors view telework as an effective tool to retain solid performers.**

As part of USDA’s Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP), Telework provides decision makers with the critical flexibilities needed to effectively, and safely, continue governmental operations, during hazardous emergency conditions, including natural disasters (such as earthquakes

and snow storms), and national security threats.

Telework also provides tangible public benefits by reducing the use of limited fossil fuel resources, which in turn reduces the level of dangerous vehicular emissions and traffic congestion.

Significantly, in this era of tight Federal budgets, telework will play a vital role in reducing Government office space costs, particularly in light of GSA’s efforts to sell approximately 1,300 Federal office buildings. More immediately, telework will reduce the amount of money USDA uses to pay for employee transit subsidies.

**The potential for budgetary savings to USDA just by reducing the costs of transit subsidies alone, could reach over one million dollars annually.**

Telework also provides employees with the flexibility to better manage work and personal or family responsibilities to achieve a greater work-life balance. In this regard, the MSPB report found that **86-percent of employees who telework indicated that teleworking had a positive impact on their satisfaction with their job and their employing organization.**

Additionally, **81-percent of these employees indicated that their telework experience had a positive impact on their desire to stay in their organization.**

An additional benefit to managers and supervisors is a more productive workforce.

Because telework enhances employee work/life effectiveness and balance, telework allows employees to better manage their work and family obligations, thereby retaining a more resilient, results-oriented Federal workforce, better able to meet agency mission and goals. In sum, a more satisfied workforce is a more productive workforce.

The total number of USDA employees eligible to participate in telework is now at 76,879 (73-percent) - up from 16,000 (15-percent) reported at the end of Fiscal Year 2010.

As an example of the magnitude of USDA’s Telework Program improvements, the Department reports a total of 17,701 (23-percent) telework agreements approved and more than 11,500 (15-percent) employees actually participating in telework in the month of September alone.

As we enter into the second year of USDA’s newly revamped Telework Program, the Department strives to reach its aggressive fiscal year goal of 45-percent participation of all eligible positions.

To learn more about the USDA Telework Program or to share your stories, visit the Work/Life and Wellness Community page on USDA Connect or send an email to [telework@dm.usda.gov](mailto:telework@dm.usda.gov).



## Pledge to Take Back Time and Money Through Telework: Expected to Save Millions in Commuting Costs During Telework Week 2012

Last year USDA participated in Telework Week with more than 500 employees pledging to participate, saving those who teleworked more than \$30,000 in commuting costs that week alone. The next Telework Week, scheduled for the week of March 5-9, 2012, is the second-annual initiative encouraging government agencies, businesses, and individuals to pledge to telework- and USDA plans to sponsor a campaign centered on drumming up larger participation rates.

Eligible and interested employees, who wish to participate in Telework Week, can visit [www.teleworkexchange.com/teleworkweek](http://www.teleworkexchange.com/teleworkweek) to pledge to telework some or all of the



week, as well as calculate potential commuter cost savings and environmental impact based on the level of participation. In 2011, nearly 40,000 individuals and organizations pledged to telework during Telework Week, collectively saving \$2.7 million in commuting costs and reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 1,818 tons

Specifically for USDA, Telework Week is a powerful tool for business operations and supports workforce productivity, enhanced recruitment and retention, reduced real estate, and increased



operational efficiency and continuity. With the one-year anniversary of the *Telework Enhancement Act of 2010* approaching, Telework Week offers USDA, among other Federal agencies, an opportunity to meet legislative mandates by testing telework programs in a pilot situation to ensure requirements are met, in addition to putting business continuity exercises to the test.

If you're interested, eligible, and approved to participate in Telework Week, visit [www.teleworkexchange.com/teleworkweek](http://www.teleworkexchange.com/teleworkweek) to pledge to telework and to calculate

potential commuter cost and environmental savings. There is no cost to pledge.

**Please note: Bargaining Unit employees' participation in Telework Week is strictly voluntary and dependent upon your individual workload, job duties, supervisor approval and computer access availability.**

**Participation in Telework will be carried out in accordance with Departmental Regulation 4080811-002, USDA Telework Program, dated January 25, 2011 and each Agency's collective bargaining agreement.**

## Diversity, Dancing, and Fun

The Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) continued its celebration of Hispanic Heritage Month in October with "Merengue and Bachata" dance lessons at its headquarters office in Alexandria, Virginia. The event underscored Cultural Transformation's "Recruitment and Retention" pillar which calls upon employees to embrace diversity and inclusion to improve performance. It provided a fantastic way to promote physical activity and highlight Hispanic culture.

Employees came together for the session to learn two unique dance styles, which originated

in the Dominican Republic. All participants received a CD with music from this event so they can continue to practice their dance moves.

FNS has a number of Cultural Transformation related activities planned, both at Headquarters/POC and throughout the regions. They include several training opportunities, a Veterans Day Celebration, SNP Fall Fair and another "Lunch with Leaders." For information on these and other events, please visit the Great for 8/Cultural Transformation section of the FNS intranet.

[mms://ocbmtcwmp.usda.gov/content/fns/0624.wmv](https://ocbmtcwmp.usda.gov/content/fns/0624.wmv) .



### UPCOMING SPECIAL OBSERVANCES

- **Martin Luther King's Birthday Celebration**  
Thursday, January 12, 2012, at the Jefferson Auditorium
- **Black History Observance**  
Thursday, February 16, 2012, at the Jefferson Auditorium
- **Women's History Month Observance**  
Thursday, March 8, 2012, at the Jefferson Auditorium

All Observances are scheduled to begin at 10:00 a. m. (EST)

## NAVY VETERAN OVERCOMES ADVERSITY TO SUCCEED

Story and Photos by Susan Blake, U.S. Forest Service

"If you're from a single parent household like me, your parent is not always there to give you direction. Some are busy working all the time just to pay the bills. That's the reality. The military gives you, direction, opportunity and discipline," said U.S. Navy Veteran Jeff Fillion of the U.S. Forest Service.

Jeff Fillion grew up in a working class family in Michigan. Back then, he didn't expect that he would eventually be working for the National Forests in Florida as their Land Surveyor and Boundary Manager.



After working in a collision shop through his high school years, he opted to join the military after graduation. He served aboard the USS Frederick as a pipefitter, maintaining and repairing mechanical piping systems.

As a 22-year old Petty Officer Second Class (PO2), he supervised as many as 80 people during naval operations as conditions warranted.

"In the civilian world you just don't get that kind of opportunity early in your career," said Fillion. "They think you're just a young kid. The military gives you

a lot of responsibility very quickly and people respect that."

At the end of his enlistment, with the GI Bill in hand, Fillion decided to go back to school.

He majored in Geomatics, a discipline that incorporates traditional techniques of land surveying along with many other disciplines of spatial data management.

After graduating from the College of Engineering at the University of Florida in 2000, Fillion landed a surveying job in the private sector, but the housing bubble burst left him without a job in 2008. "Things were going good and then everything just crashed and burned," recalls Fillion.

Fortunately, in 2009, Fillion landed a position with the U.S. Forest Service as Land Surveyor and Boundary Manager. Since then he has tried to be at the top of his game in every aspect of his field.

Today, Fillion stands on the cutting edge of surveying technology with his surveyor grade GPS system, acquired by the National Forests in Florida, and the benefits are enormous. The surveyor grade equipment includes unit correcting GPS data from cell towers and a dedicated web data service for real-time accuracy.

"When it comes to monumentation and boundaries, feet are not acceptable. You have to be within a few 100<sup>ths</sup> of a foot," said Fillion.

The icing on the cake is Fillion's GIS pole. A GPS receiver can be mounted on the GIS pole, connected via Bluetooth, eliminating the need to carry around individual components used for measuring angles and distances.

"You got your boots, safety helmet, snake chaps and machete walking through the swamp. You can only carry so much safely," said Fillion.

Often property monuments or boundary line markers cannot be located in thick vegetation with canopies of overgrowth



blocking GPS signals. With his GIS pole, Fillion can stand in a clearing, target objects in severe overgrowth, measure angle and distance and pinpoint a coordinate without even getting his shoes dirty.

In addition, the surveyor grade GPS and GIS pole eliminate traditional surveying techniques such as prolonged repetitive steps that require traversing or cutting through heavy woodland areas measuring angles and distances to establish landlines.

"Traversing a mile in the woods could literally take you days to pinpoint coordinates. With GPS I just collect the data points and I'm done in couple of hours," according to Fillion.

The National Forests in Florida have about 1,200 miles of landlines to date with further growth in the future. Landlines can be obscured by vegetation and over time paint can degrade until the original markings are lost and the area must be surveyed again.

"Once a landline is gone, it's very expensive to have it resurveyed," according to Fillion. "If you had to contract surveying landlines it could cost up to \$10,000 a mile to have that boundary survey put in place. Two miles and you've paid for this equipment."

"This new equipment is accurate and efficient, and the long-term cost-saving benefits for the taxpayer and Forest Service are huge," said Fillion.

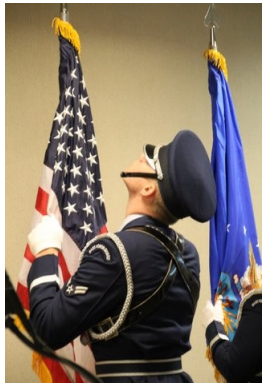
Fillion also serves as the Veteran's Special Emphasis Program Manager, organizing the Forest Service participation in the 2011 Veterans Day Parade here in Tallahassee, Florida.



## NIFA Recognizes Its Veterans

By Kimberly Whittet

Veterans Day honors all American veterans, both living and dead. On Veterans Day each year we thank veterans for their dedicated and loyal service to their country. November 11 is the day the Nation sets aside to ensure veterans know that we deeply appreciate the sacrifices they have made to keep our country free.



On Nov. 7, 2011, NIFA, in recognition of Veterans Day, honored all veterans – as well as the agency's own military veterans – in a ceremony at the Water-

front Centre. Presentations included a description of ongoing NIFA initiatives relating to the military community and their families; historical highlights and

trivia from all four of the military branches; and several of NIFA's veterans shared their personal military experiences and displayed memorabilia from their military careers.

Jesse Stevens, sergeant in the U.S. Marine Corps Reserve, helped organized the event. "We are proud to have the opportunity to honor NIFA employees who served in the military and reflect on those who sacrificed their lives in past and present wars for our great Nation." The posting and retiring of the Colors was conducted by the Joint Base Andrews Honor Guard. During the ceremony everyone took part in a moment of silence to honor those who have served our country.



Ellen Frank, Director of Communications and US Army Veteran, was the guest speaker and described her seven years of active duty in the US Army and six years in the National Guard. She currently serves as a volunteer in the Maryland Defense Force.



Jesse Stevens, sergeant in the U.S. Marine Corps Reserve, helped organize the event.



Arthur Pridemore, IT Specialist and US Army Veteran, provided a history of the US Army.



Dr. Chavonda Jacobs-Young, Acting Director of NIFA, provided opening comments.



Effie Baldwin, Senior Policy Specialist and US Army Veteran, provided a history of the US Navy.



Scott Elliott, Communications Specialist and US Air Force Veteran, provided a history of the US Air Force.



Robert Martin, Records Management Officer and US Air Force Veteran, provided a history of the US Coast Guard.



Herb Bolton, National Program Leader and US Navy Veteran, provided closing remarks.

## APHIS-Wildlife Services: Mission Intertwined with Military

By Michael A. Booth

In Kyrgyzstan, no one came into Chris Croson's U.S. military staging base without him knowing about it – and when fellow Wildlife Services (WS) employee and veteran Dan Young flew in on military orders, Croson was there to meet him.

Croson, WS state director in West Virginia, and logistics officer in the Air National Guard, was deployed to Kyrgyzstan from May to November 2009 in support of U.S. military operations in the Middle East. A few months before Croson arrived in Kyrgyzstan, two WS employees passed through the same staging base on the way to help the military prevent bird strikes at air bases in Afghanistan and Iraq.

This meeting of USDA employees on military operations overseas may appear to be coincidental but, in WS, the odds of a similar meeting are high. The mission of WS is often intertwined with the military – and the Secretary's goal of Cultural Transformation.

The WS program carries out the Federal responsibility for helping to solve problems that occur when human activity and wildlife are in conflict with one another. On military bases, in the U.S. and overseas, those conflicts may involve aircraft.

The U.S. military utilizes the expertise of wildlife biologists in WS to deter wildlife from flight paths and runways. Mike Begier, airport wildlife hazards program National coordinator, says WS' involvement with the military is constantly growing, and having veterans in WS' ranks is an advantage. WS employees have been on rotating tours at military bases in Afghanistan and Iraq, where one employee is stationed in each country to

prevent bird strikes on aircraft and diffuse other conflicts with wildlife.

"We've had employees in Iraq and Afghanistan for more than two years, serving four-month assignments," Begier said.

"Our veterans in the program are very motivated, especially with the Iraq and Afghanistan project. They're a great asset because they've been there, done that' already."

Many veterans have found work in WS to be a natural fit following their military careers or while serving in the reserves. WS officials know they have something attractive to offer Veterans—not just a career, but something that closely matches a unique skill set.

Jon Cepek, Wildlife Biologist in Ohio, works at his local Army National Guard base as both a reservist and USDA employee. He sometimes finds himself on

the base, literally switching hats for different purposes.

"(WS) has been everything I hoped for and more," Cepek said. "My military background has definitively helped. I understand the hierarchy, the terminology, and the different concerns of both the military and civilian sides."

Croson says the outdoor aspect of WS work often reminds him and two other veterans who work with him of their military duties. Like Cepek, his duties often overlap on his military base.

"The conditions are the same," said Croson, "It's nothing to go out all night and pitch a tent in extreme conditions... The people on the base know what I do. They don't hesitate to ask for help, even when I'm on mili-

tary duty. It's a distinct advantage."

Whether or not Veterans in WS work directly with the military, their experiences remain a part of who they are. Mike Marlow, WS-Colorado and Army Veteran, is one of several APHIS employees around the country who volunteer their time for the Wounded Warrior Project.

Marlow and others help with several bow hunting trips for wounded veterans on an Army installation in Oklahoma. "It's not just about the hunt," Marlow said. "It's about fellowship and camaraderie. It's important for us to open our arms to them."

Through his work in WS, Marlow also discovered that the civilian Federal service record of WS employees only reflected their Veteran status if they were hired under a Veterans hiring authority.

WS worked with Agency human resources personnel and determined that our Veterans couldn't be accurately accounted for. The Agency is now working to solve that problem and more information for employees is expected soon.

WS leadership believes that all veterans should be accounted for because cultural transformation for Veterans in USDA should feel like stepping off a plane in Kyrgyzstan—and finding a familiar face waiting.

WS personnel at an air base in Oklahoma scan the runway for wildlife as an F-15 takes off.



A Wildlife Services employee conducts a pyrotechnic dispersal at Langley Air Force Base in Virginia.





## FNS Observes Veterans Day

USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) observed Veterans Day on November 9, 2011, at a special event held at its Alexandria, Virginia headquarters. Dr. Ivan Ware, an original member of the "Tuskegee Airmen," was the featured speaker. In addition, veterans who now work at FNS were publically recognized and thanked for their service. Employees throughout the country participated through video confer-

encing and several regions also held separate commemorations.

The Tuskegee Airmen were an all-Black fighter group, trained in Tuskegee, Alabama, whose record of success in escorting bombers during World War II is unmatched. Dr. Ware also participated in another legendary operation, the "Red Ball Express," which was the convoy supply lifeline to

troops in the field across Europe. Dr. Ware's first-hand remarks focused on how the Tuskegee Airmen and the primarily African-American Red Ball Express operation made vital contributions toward civil rights and the ultimate integration of the U.S. military.

FNS takes Cultural Transformation's "Recruitment and Retention" pillar, which calls upon agencies



Military honor guards commence FNCS' Veterans Days ceremony.

to embrace diversity and inclusion to improve performance, very seriously. Along these lines, FNS has a longstanding tradition of reaching out to and hiring men and women who served previously in the Armed Forces. Approximately 25-percent of the FNS current workforce is comprised of veterans. FNS also encourages its employees to support [www.JoiningForces.gov](http://www.JoiningForces.gov), a group established by First Lady Michelle Obama and Dr. Jill Biden to assist military families.



Dr. Ivan Ware (right) spoke movingly about the role of Black service members from the Civil War to the present day. Here he receives an FNS Coin from Undersecretary Kevin Concannon.

**The Government-Wide Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan and Guidance is up on the Office of Personnel Management Diversity and Inclusion website.**

**You can view it here: <http://www.opm.gov/diversityandinclusion/index.aspx>**

### Cultural Transformation Tip of the Month

**Good managers know that the goal is not to get the most work out of people but to help people get the most out of work.**

*(Thanks to employee Juanda Rogers for the tip!)*



## MYUSDA

Please mark your calendar

## Save the Date

USDA National Service Day  
Honoring  
Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s Birthday  
Thursday, January 12, 2012  
Jefferson Auditorium  
10:00 AM  
Your participation and support will be appreciated.



If you'd like to share your feedback about Cultural Transformation, telework, diversity, or any other aspect of work/life at USDA, send an email to: [MyUSDA@dm.usda.gov](mailto:MyUSDA@dm.usda.gov) or visit USDA's [Work/Life and Wellness](#) community website if you have access to [USDA Connections](#).

Catch Up on Previous Issues of MyUSDA!

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### MyUSDA Publication Schedule

- The January issue of *MyUSDA* will be published on Tuesday, January 24, 2012.
- The deadline for January submissions is Thursday, January 19, 2012.

### Guidance on Submissions to MyUSDA

Submissions to *MyUSDA* should indicate progress that you, your agency, or your mission area have achieved toward implementing the Secretary's Cultural Transformation (CT) Initiative. Submissions may be in the form of a traditional article with a byline (with accompanying photos strongly preferred), a first-person account (describing a personal work-related experience relating to CT progress), or a "brief" (just a few sentences describing a successful Cultural Transformation event, group, initiative, or activity...or some other relevant worklife issue.)

The ideal submission is a great picture with about 75-150 words to go along with it.

Email submissions or further inquiries to

[MyUSDA@dm.usda.gov](mailto:MyUSDA@dm.usda.gov)